Supervisors Vote Down Silver City Resort Plan

By JOE ROSATO
Times-Delta Staff Writer

Tulare County supervisors, in a 4-1 vote yesterday, decided it would be "premature" to allow a multi-million dollar resort at Silver City, 12 miles east of Three Rivers.

On a motion by Raymond Muller, seconded by Charles Cummings, the board said it felt approval of the development, now estimated to cost about $10 million, should wait until the proposed highway into Mineral King is approved and the first contracts let. Mineral King is the area 55 miles east of Visalia, proposed by Walt Disney Productions for a $35-million year-round resort.

The Tulare County Planning Commission approved the "concept" of the proposed development on May 14.

M. R. (Jim) James, Sequoia National Forest Supervisor, said the status of the proposed $20-million highway (designated Highway 276) is "still in limbo" because agreement has not been reached on the federal level on design criteria.

Don Crawford, representing the applicants, said he was "disturbed" that supervisors would, in effect, deny one private development until a roadway leading to another private development (Mineral King) is approved. Crawford called the board's denial "precedent setting." He is a member of the Hanford consulting firm, Grunwald, Crawford and Associates.

According to the Silver City proposal, submitted by Mrs. Walter Seaborn of Three Rivers and Walter Wells of Scottsdale, Ariz., the resort would include a 30-unit motel, 72-unit lodge, service station, 20 condominiums, 48 single-family units and a convenience center that would house a multi-purpose building, restaurant and swimming pool, all situated on about 160 acres.

The lone vote in favor of the proposal was cast by Robert Harrell of Visalia.

He argued that one of the conditions already imposed by planning commissioners was that the development would not go in unless the highway is approved.

Opposition to the plans was voiced by the Sequoia National Forest supervisor and George Whitmore, representing the Tehipite Chapter of the Sierra Club.

James said approval of the project would mean "putting the cart before the horse" because of the uncertainty regarding the status of the highway. Approval, he said, "would do what everyone claims it will do, overdevelop the area." James said the public must "admit" that everything east of Three Rivers will be developed in the same manner if the project is approved.

Evaluation of the Mineral King project indicates that any significant commercial development in the Silver City area, or elsewhere in the Mineral King basin, on privately-owned land, James said, would be in direct conflict with the basic project. "Such development could in fact endanger the project."

He added the Silver City project is dependent on the Mineral King project for its "economic viability" and is not in the best interest of the general public. Because of the effect road construction can have on esthetics, the capacity of the road must be kept to a minimum, James commented. "Studies show its peak capacity is committed to the public service needs of the Mineral King Valley."

The Sierra Club spokesman said "the proposed development of Silver City would intensify the tragedy of Mineral King. The Disney proposal is bad enough by itself," Whitmore said, but the "Wells - Seaborn and similar proposals will only compound the problems and thereby generate further hostility toward Disney for having started it all.

"Like a cancer which has once become established, there is no stopping its malignant spread across the landscape."

The applicants pointed out their development would encompass 296 units capable of housing about 1,100 persons whereas to develop the area "right now under existing rules and regulations" they could construct more than 800 units to facilitate 3,100 persons.

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